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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001168

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH NSA ALIYU
MOHAMMED TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF SECURITY ASSISTANCE

REF: ABUJA 1091

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER FOR REASONS 1.5(B)
AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 3, Ambassador Jeter met NSA General (Ret.) Aliyu Mohammed to raise concerns about the lack of Nigerian support for MPRI and Operation Avid Recovery (OAR). The Ambassador warned that obstacles faced by the OAR EOD support team and Nigeria's non-payment on MPRI are sending the wrong signals to Washington and could threaten the future of our security assistance relationship. END SUMMARY

2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by Office of Defense Cooperation Chief and Staff Assistant (Note-Taker), began by presenting NSA Mohammed with the original letter from POTUS to President Obasanjo offering USG assistance following the Ikeja munitions explosions. Ambassador expressed his desire to meet President Obasanjo before departing for the upcoming Chief of Mission Conference in Washington. General Mohammed agreed to try to make that possible. (Note: The meeting did take place, see REF A)

MPRI:

3. (C) Ambassador gave General Mohammed the unfortunate news that MPRI had been significantly downsized and half of the MPRI team had left Nigeria due to the funding shortfall on the Nigerian side. Ambassador said that MPRI was on the brink of being discontinued altogether until the GON committed 1.5 million dollars in FMF funding to continue MPRI with a radically reduced civil military component. Ambassador explained that although the program continues it was no "occasion to celebrate" because the stop-gap payment still meant that the GON had not contributed its own funds to the program. Ambassador Jeter warned that Nigeria's failure to cost share the program may be interpreted by Washington as a lack of commitment and threaten future security assistance programs. Ambassador explained that the continuance of the entire security assistance program at existing levels in Nigeria is directly related to the continued success of MPRI.

4. (C) General Mohammed expressed disappointment that MPRI had diminished, recalling that he "pushed the program from the beginning". When President Obasanjo visited Washington prior to his inauguration in 1999, Mohammed said that he insisted that the President visit MPRI. According to General Mohammed, "In Washington, everything was good but when MPRI came to Nigeria, that's when things went wrong." The NSA said that there is an apparent misunderstanding between the Service Chiefs and the MPRI personnel who run the program. He promised to raise the issue with President Obasanjo as soon as possible. Despite the difficulties, Ambassador said that the U.S. is still willing to commit the full 3.5 million if Nigeria antes up its half.

5. (C) The Ambassador raised additional concerns about the transparency of the Nigerian money transfer process. He said we may be heading in the same direction as last year, when Nigeria's MPRI payment was delayed in Nigeria's Central Bank so long that the exchange rate changed leaving a gap of nearly \$319,000. The MOD now claims to have paid the \$319,000 deficit and bank statements show a transfer of Naira from the Central Bank of Nigeria but the money has yet to show up at the Federal Reserve account. When it does show, Ambassador said, there will probably be another

deficit caused by exchange fluctuations (Note: The money was subsequently received).

16. (C) The Ambassador asked if Mohammed knew the status of the transfer. He responded that he did not know and frankly, " does not understand the system either." Even 119 billion Naira deposited by the President for GON expenditures is caught up in the Central Bank's bureaucracy.

Operation Avid Recovery

17. (C) The Ambassador then shifted the conversation to Operation Avid Recovery and explained the rationale for our rapid assistance in the face of Nigeria's devastating tragedy. "We did it for the obvious humanitarian reasons but also to maintain the credibility and legitimacy of the Nigerian military."

17. (C) Ambassador said that the EOD specialists have made significant progress in the clean up but we have reached a crossroads in our efforts. He explained that since the EOD team was sent here for only 60 days, their departure is imminent. In compliance with POTUS's letter to President Obasanjo, we are willing to provide contractors to finish the job.

18. (C) The Ambassador cautioned, however, that given the lack of cooperation received by the EOD team, the Embassy was prepared to recommend that contractors come only if they are promised the full cooperation of the military and government. One of the conditions was that the contractor's equipment must be imported duty free and without complications; another was that the GON provide the C4 to detonate munitions since the EOD team had been using its own C4 and that supply was now exhausted. Without a commitment to meet these conditions, Ambassador said it would be impossible for contractors to carry out their duties.

19. (C) Ambassador informed the NSA that the Ministry of Defense is prohibiting a special EOD unit from inspecting other potentially hazardous munition sites. The GON had earlier asked for this assistance and we did everything to meet this request. The GON's reversal sent a message of distrust with the clear accusation that the U.S. would engage in spying. No partnership could be based on that, the Ambassador said. The EOD special assessment team may leave next week if not allowed to do their job. General Mohammed waxed philosophical by responding that human beings and institutions fear change because they are unsure of the outcome. Nigeria is doing its best to bring changes but progress is slow.

110. (C) The NSA asked the Ambassador whether he has spoken to MOD headquarters about the problems of access. Jeter responded that it is one thing to speak to the MOD, it is another to get the message to the guys on the ground.

111. (C) General Mohammed promised to raise problems with both MPRI and OAR with President Obasanjo but cautioned that his influence was limited. He said that the President's conflicts with his own political party makes change difficult.

112. (C) Ambassador added that these issues together with the recent media coverage of Nigeria have caused a problematic perception in Washington. Ambassador Jeter concluded, MPRI and OAR are success stories for the U.S. but skepticism still existed in Washington and the absence of Nigeria's full cooperation only increased the questioning.